



Nurturing self-sufficiency

2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT



EDUCATION · MENTORING · ENTREPRENEURSHIP · COMMUNITY



A letter from

Dawn Ellinwood

CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We are Mercy Connections.

We strive to find the deeper meaning of living in a community that is steeped in caring for one another. We celebrate the life-changing work of our staff. Each day results in positive steps forward for our participants through our diverse and impactful programs. Over the past year, we witnessed and celebrated adult learners achieving educational success and increased self-sufficiency, aspiring female entrepreneurs empowered to make informed decisions on business ownership, and people successfully transitioning out of the criminal justice system and engaging in pro-social activities that reduce risk behavior. We do not take our work for granted, as it is this work that has a meaningful and lasting impact. Each person who walks through our door in search of a better life, every volunteer who gives time to help others learn, and the many people who support our mission of building a just community are Mercy Connections.

Mercy Connections is in transition with the retirement of Dolly Fleming. Dolly leaves our organization strong and positioned to move forward into its next iteration. With deep gratitude to Dolly, we look to build on the foundation she nurtured and strengthened.

We are thrilled our new Executive Director, Lisa Falcone, picked up the torch and will work to continue and grow the programs, relationships, and outcomes that are Mercy Connections. Supporting Mercy Connections is one powerful and strategic way to make a positive difference in our community. We are grateful so many share our vision for a just, compassionate, and productive community. Each of you is vital in our continued success and significance.

With gratitude,

Cover photo: Carlos hones his English language skills in Tutoring class.

Education & Transition Programs

AZHAR, PARTICIPANT



Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

My life's journey began in Iraq, Baghdad. It is the place I was raised and grew to love. If you were to ask me years ago if I ever imagined myself leaving Iraq, I would have said no. It wasn't until I had children that I started to look for a way out.

“Mercy Connections served as that push forward towards my goals.”

AZHAR

In 2003, the Iraqi war began and took almost everything away from us. I lost my home and my career. With what little we had left we fled to Syria. Syria became my second home and even though our living situation was not ideal, I was happy. All that mattered was we were safe and had a roof over our heads. However, another war with Syria started in 2011, and I saw things too horrible to describe. My search for a new home began.

Over 140 people regularly participated in Education & Transition Programs classes, workshops, and events; 100% said they gained useful new education or insights

Fortunately, the US took us in after a six-year wait. Moving to Vermont presented challenges and big changes; the culture and language were completely foreign. Immigrating can be lonely at times and very difficult, especially when raising six kids that are at very different stages of life.



Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

I was lucky enough to be introduced to Mercy Connections by a friend when I was going through this transition alone in the US. Mercy Connections served as that push forward towards my goals. Mercy Connections has not only helped me improve my English and study for my citizenship exam, but it also helped me to create long-lasting friendships and a second family. I took three classes: Developing Self, Geography Bee and Kindling Connections, and I began to see myself and make goals for myself. This tight-knit community is a place to flourish and become the best version of yourself.

Azhar continues to study in preparation for her United States Citizenship Exam.

Justice & Mentoring Programs

RANEE, MENTEE



Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

I was 12 years old when I started running away from home. As I look back, I think about the driving forces of being adopted, not feeling truly loved or truly wanted. My need to escape increased as my inner struggles manifested as addiction. I have been incarcerated eight times during my adulthood. Each time has been directly related to my addiction. I have six children whom I love deeply. I have longed to be there for them and to provide them with the love and support that I desperately wanted and needed.

“I am grateful to receive services from Mercy Connections and am proof their program is effective.”

RANEE

In September 2015, I was incarcerated for the eighth time and my life changed. I made a decision to choose me and to choose the person I want to be:



a mother, life partner, friend, and productive citizen. I was introduced to Mercy Connections during my incarceration period. I attended the Fostering Hope and Strength classes.

Exactly two years later, I signed a lease, beginning the planning process of my future. I continued to engage with Mercy Connections and received an amazing mentor that was carefully matched with me.

My mentor was open, interested, and committed to supporting me. I was able to confide in her and trusted her in



Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

helping me reintegrate into my community. Mercy Connections offers individuals the backing they need to live productive lives. The care that is taken to consider the needs of a mentee in their mentorship program* makes the experience successful. I am grateful to receive services from Mercy Connections and am proof their program is effective.

Ranee now has stable employment, housing, a vehicle, and is a proud mother and grandmother.

50 incarcerated women participated in Fostering Hope & Strength in the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility; 100% say they gained new awareness and insights

*Vermont Women's Mentoring Program is a collaborative partnership between Mercy Connections and the Vermont Department of Corrections.

Women's Small Business Program

KATIE, GRADUATE/OWNER, KZ COUTURE



Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

In fall of 2017, I participated in the Women's Small Business Program through Mercy Connections. At first I wasn't sure why I was doing what I was doing, since I felt as though I had a fairly established business as a bridal seamstress. However, I decided to give it a shot.

"I gained more from the program than I anticipated. I rebranded my business and established relationships with a group of strong, entrepreneurial minded women."

KATIE

I found the program to be extremely beneficial, not only because I was able to learn some things I hadn't ever thought of, but also because I was able to offer my experiences to all of these other amazing women. There were also times when I felt validated as one of the instructors would

115 people took actions on their business and financial goals through participation in the Women's Small Business Program; 22 women plan to launch or expand their businesses in the next three years

tell us about a particular tactic or skill that I had been doing for years and didn't even realize that it was actually something others did with their businesses.

I gained more from the program than I anticipated. I rebranded my business and established relationships with a group of strong, entrepreneurial-minded women. I also found a studio space for my business so

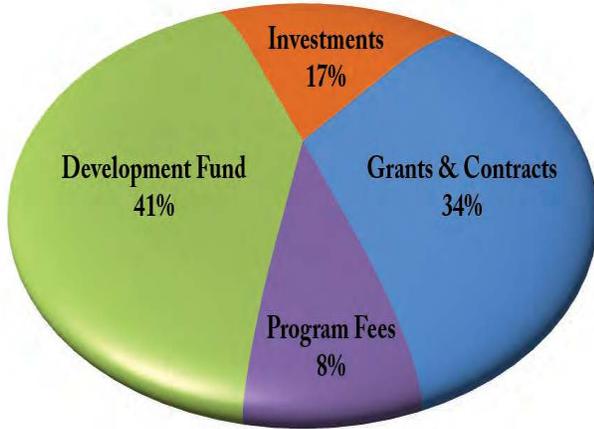


Photo credit: Karen Pike Photography

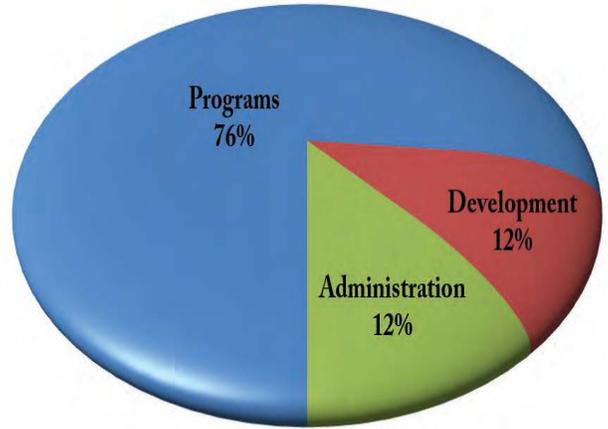
that I could move it out of my home. I have been busier this year than I was last year and anticipate this trend to continue. I have reached goals and accomplished things that I never imagined were possible. I am currently living my dream life.

Katie has established strong referral systems with several area bridal stores, keeping her busy throughout the year. KZ Couture is located in Essex Junction.

Financials



Revenues \$886,950



Expenses \$874,455

Foundations, Grants, and Major Gifts

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May Luncheon 2018

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We are Mercy Connections.

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**For more information and a complete listing of our many generous donors and over 200 volunteers,
please visit our website at: mercyconnections.org**

Mercy Connections is an educational values-driven non-profit organization living the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy with an enduring concern for women. By compassionately nurturing self-sufficiency through education, mentoring, entrepreneurship and community, people are empowered to make significant life changes.